



**Testimony of the Alliance for Children's Mental Health (ACMH)
Before the Appropriations Committee
February 16, 2017**

**Department of Children and Families (DCF) budget cuts and changes
H.B. 7027 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM FY 2017-18**

Good afternoon Representative Walker, Senator Formica, Senator Osten, and members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Susan Kelley, and I am Director of the Alliance for Children's Mental Health (ACMH) (formerly, KTP Children's Committee). ACMH is a statewide policy and advocacy group in that focuses solely on children's mental health issues, including the critical overlap of mental health with child-serving systems such as education, child welfare, and juvenile justice in Connecticut. Through our collective voice, we advocate for smart policy and better outcomes for all children in the state. I am here today to testify regarding the proposed DCF budget.

We are mindful of our state's fiscal crisis, and very much appreciate all of your many hours of hard work to find workable and balanced solutions in the face of so many competing yet compelling interests.

ACMH is generally supportive of the proposed budget as it relates to children's mental health. We are grateful that funding is proposed to remain steady or with slight increases for successful programs, such as the behavioral health consultation program, Access Mental Health, which provides critical consultation between child psychiatrists and pediatricians for children in the primary care setting regardless of their insurance status; family violence outreach and counseling (which can lead to trauma and mental health issues for children); and the early childhood consultative partnership program.

While DCF's budget remains relatively strong, we are concerned, however, about significant related proposed cuts to the State Department of Education (SDE), and the Department of Public Health (DPH), that when taken together, potentially will have significant negative impact on children with behavioral health issues and families.

ACMH is further concerned that these cuts may reflect lack of coordination between child serving agencies relating to issues affecting children's mental health.

For example, SDE's budget proposes to cut Family Resource Centers by 50% and the Primary Mental Health Program by 10%. In existence since the 1980's via legislative mandate, FRCs are the hub for thriving local networks to support families and their children on school readiness issues, particularly young children up to 2nd grade. Currently, there are approximately 72 FRCs throughout the state located at or near schools. In this time of fiscal

crisis, the FRCs are a prime example of how existing resources should be revitalized to meet current family needs—today this means the critical need for mental health resources/information. An evaluation of FRCs from 2008 recognized the growing need for mental health training and information (even before the Sandy Hook tragedy) and the potential for FRCs to meet this need. Here is a link to the report.

http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/DEPS/Family/FRC/FRC_Evaluation.pdf

ACMH, and its member participant/fiduciary NAMI Connecticut, have received a grant for 2017 in which it will be creating a model for providing mental health training/information/resources to families through the hub of FRCs in the New Britain, East Hartford, and Bloomfield. ACMH would welcome the opportunity to partner with state agencies to facilitate this model and grow the important and cost effective initiative.

Similarly, the DPH budget proposes to cut School Based Health Centers (SBHCs) by 10% which amounts to \$1,128,063. This cut is dramatic, representing a total of \$2.5 million reduction to SBHCs since January of 2105. SBHCs are an effective statewide system for getting mental health and physical health services to students in the place that is conducive for them to receive services and referrals—schools. SBHCs, integration of behavioral health into primary care settings, and mental health services by counselors and other clinicians in schools are all effective means for providing access for children to meet their behavioral needs. Efforts in each of these areas needs to be maintained and coordinated for the benefit for all children in the state unless and until there is a comprehensive system in place that would necessitate their reduction/elimination.

Coordination of child-serving agencies on issues concerning children's mental health is a current objective of the Children's Behavioral Health Plan Implementation Advisory Board. Nevertheless, the proposed cuts appear to go against the state's central strategy of early intervention/prevention in children's mental health, particularly in schools, as articulated in the PA 12-178 Children's Behavioral Health Plan. As a result, ACMH is concerned that coordination is not happening at the advisory level and that the Children's Behavioral Health Plan is not likely to be meaningful/ move forward without an independent oversight body (through reconfiguration of the current advisory board or other means) to set, vet, and oversee the overall course of children's mental health.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Respectfully submitted (without oral testimony),

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Director of Children's Policy, NAMI Connecticut

ACMH is housed at NAMI Connecticut; NAMI Connecticut is a member participant and fiduciary for AMCH

ACMH Member Participants

Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance (CTJJA)
CT Legal Services
CT Community Non Profit Alliance
FAVOR
African Caribbean American Parents of Children with Disabilities (AFCAMP)
Connecticut Association of Foster and Adoptive Families (CAFAF)
National Alliance on Mental Illness, Connecticut (NAMI Connecticut)
National Association of Social Workers, Connecticut
Child Guidance Center of Southern CT
The Village of Children and Families
Jesse Lewis Choose Love Foundation
Susan Graham, Family Champion and CONNECT consultant
Christine Rowan, Parent (Newtown)
Lori Clemente, Parent (Haddam)
David Marcus, Parent, Innovative Advocacy Solutions LLC
Connecticut Association of School Based Health Centers
Yale School of Public Health
Child Health and Development Institute (CHDI)
Child First
Office of the Child Advocate
Stamford Youth Services Bureau
Achievement First
Early Childhood Alliance
Empowering Children and Families
Kids in Crisis
CT Voices for Children
Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
Center for Children's Advocacy (CCA)
Dr. Mirela Loftus, Child Psychiatrist, Institute of Living,
President Elect, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry